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ABSTRACT

A course for improving Dutch reading proficiency of entering university students was developed by the Linguistic and Literacy Studies department of the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands. Dutch secondary school students receive instruction in text-specific approaches to reading but no instruction in reading methodology. The course focuses on the application of a flexible and efficient way of reading that combines reading styles according to the reading purpose. Scanning, search reading, skimming, receptive reading, and responsive reading are taught. The student is expected to progress from reading word by word to flexible use of reading styles in individual reading situations. The course consists of six sessions devoted to discussion and reading assignments. The subject matter of most of the texts is language, literature, and communication. The exercises elicit either surface level facts or deeper level meanings. The texts used for the final test are described. The focus and assignments of each of the six sessions are listed in an appendix. (RW)

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Developing a reading course

Since September 1981 a new field of study has been in existence in The Netherlands: Linguistic and Literary Studies, set up in the University of Tilburg. What distinguishes the Faculty of Letters in Tilburg from those in other universities is that its students do not read linguistics and literature from the point of view of one particular language, with the possibility of moving on to general linguistics or literature after graduation; if they decide to enroll in Tilburg they will encounter a situation in which linguistics and literature take up a central position from the beginning, individual languages being looked upon as areas of application only, although the emphasis is on Dutch and English, the best accessible languages for the majority of the students. Analogously to the research-themes around which research and curriculum have been set up, four so-called 'working units' have been established, namely Problems of Linguistic Minorities, Comparison of Grammatical Models, Sociology of Literature and Text Linguistics. In the near future working units will also be established for Didactics of Literature and Computer Linguistics. By the side of all these the working unit of 'language proficiency' has been set up, which provides instruction in Dutch and English. This proficiency training is intended to be linked to the courses given by the other working units.

As staff members for Dutch language proficiency we have been responsible, in the new department's first year, for language instruction to 74 students which primarily aimed at raising the level of proficiency of secondary school leavers. In this paper we shall restrict ourselves to the subject of reading proficiency for which we had 12 hours in seminars at our disposal, supplemented with the same number of study hours.

Before giving a description of our course we shall briefly outline the initial situation as far as reading proficiency is concerned in which most students find themselves when entering a Dutch university. Next we shall relate a delineation of the objectives to theoretical considerations of the type to be found in Pugh (1978) after which we shall describe the course itself. We shall wind up by saying a word or two about the final test which the students took in the form of a reading report.

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The initial situation

Within mother-tongue teaching in the Netherlands instruction in reading proficiency has gone through a slow but fairly definitive development. As early as the twenties a widening gap was observed between primary school (pupils up to the age of 12) and secondary education (pupils up to the age of 17). Attempts to bridge this gap were not made: people preferred to go for its complete annihilation. Pupils at the bottom of the ladder who were held responsible for the phenomenon observed had to disappear. So a new selection procedure was looked for and found in the silent reading text with questions; a test which makes no appeal to factual knowledge, but to a large number of abilities, as a result of which it acquires the halo of an intelligence test. Gradually silent reading has lost this function, but as a means of selection at primary and secondary education level it certainly has not fallen into disuse. H. Kreeft (1977) formulates the aim of the silent reading text with questions as follows:

> 'Testing of text comprehension in a narrow sense, i.e. "the activity of reading, directed at the assimilation of that part of the textual content of which it may be said that all readers will arrive at a roughly similar interpretation".'

The majority of the students in a Faculty of Letters in the Netherlands attended a minimum of six years of secondary education by way of preliminary training. When one takes a bird's eye view of the various methods in the teaching of Dutch it appears that at least up to their fifth year students are confronted with silent reading texts of the type indicated above. The texts they are given are isolated from the communicative chain in which they have originally functioned, and are followed by text-dependent questions which are restricted to knowledge of words, references within the text, the writing of summaries of parts of the text in the student's own words, and to structure. Questions that may induce students to evaluate form and content of the text, and assignments that may lead them to apply data from the text to situations outside the text are almost totally lacking. This text-dependent system of asking questions does not provide pupils with any opportunity to develop an instrument with which to approach the phenomenon 'text' (see also Braet 1979).

But we are now witnessing a turn of the tide which may prove permanent. Reading is no longer regarded as the ability to arrive at the comprehension of one particular text, but as an ability that should enable us to acquire a methodology that fits to many text types. The most important book that adopts this new approach seems to be TAALDADEN ('language acts', Braet 1979), a course in two parts, in which the author tries to make his pupils realize what rhetorical strategies writers use and to provide them with instruments to assimilate, and write, texts. A central position is taken up by the time-honoured insight that contents, ordering, formulation and presentation are determined by objectives on the one hand and intended audience on the other. An opinion poll among our students showed that only 4 out of 74 had worked with TAALDADEN. The others had used either no reading method at all in secondary school (and had only been tested 3 or 4 times a year by means of a text plus questions), or a method like SCHRIJVENDERWIJS (roughly 'an easy way of learning how to write' Kleinhout-Moerman 1965), a reading method which constitutes a continuation of what has earlier been described as 'silent reading texts with questions'.

So far the knowledge acquired by students up to the fifth form in secondary school. However, the final reading comprehension test at secondary school level consists of a (semi-)scientific or scholarly text of about 2000 words, which the candidates are supposed to reduce to about one-fifth of the original length in such a way that matters of primary importance are distinguished from those of secondary importance and that the author's reasoning has apparently been understood. The last few months of the curriculum are mainly devoted to helping pupils acquire this ability. The preceding instruction, silent reading followed by text-specific questions which attempt to test text comprehension, is then implicitly looked upon as preparation for this summarizing. But here we have the same problem: didactic methods of learning how to summarize are hardly available. Often teachers content themselves with holding a number of tests which have hardly been preceded by any teaching process at all. As in illustration we may here mention the frequently used method SCHRIJVENDERWIJS, which, sure enough, offers a number of exercises which aim specifically at one of the

skills involved (for example, distinguishing primary from secondary matters) but which consists, for 80%, of texts that are followed by the above-mentioned text-dependent questions and/or the summarizing assignment.

We may therefore claim that when entering university, students have hardly received any instruction in reading methodology. Every text is approached text-specifically, the main purpose being comprehension of the text itself; and instruction in the process of summarizing may be said to be virtually non-existent.

A bit of theory

From what you have read up till now you may have gathered what is at the bottom of our type of reading instruction for students. The objective of our course may be formulated as follows: to give information about and teach the application of a flexible and efficient way of reading, which consists of varying combinations of reading styles, depending on the reading purpose the reader has set himself (and modifies while reading); this implies that our students are also subjected to a consciousness- raising process in regard to the following questions:

- what sort of skill is reading
- what exactly is my reading purpose
- what factors (both personal and external) influence me while reading.

As to the various reading styles: we have based ourselves on the description given by Pugh (1978), namely scanning, search reading, skimming, receptive reading and responsive reading. Tony Pugh has been at the cradle of our course in Tilburg, which in many respects resembles the course he developed in Leeds. In some respects however, our course differs from his and we are therefore very interested in the results of the research announced by Pugh and Ulijn (1981): "The emphasis is on studying realistic reading tasks and the aim is to seek matches between text structures proposed by analysts and those structures revealed by patterns in the reader's visual behaviour."

As teachers we have put most of our time and creativity into designing realistic reading tasks; yet the temporarily isolated training in the various reading styles (and the necessity of a continued recognition of the differences) remained a handicap for our students.

One special feature of our course is that we pay more attention to responsive reading (reflection, argumentation, creativity) because our course is not destined for a wide, general, student audience, but for students of Letters for whom the reflection on reading itself is of extreme importance.

The course itself

Before discussing some details in relation to the course's setup we will make a few general remarks (see also Appendix).
The course consists of six sessions of one and a half hours and an introduction of half an hour. For studying and doing exercises at home approximately the same amount of time is needed. The sessions consist roughly of two parts: discussion about information studied and tasks fulfilled, and various reading assignments. At home similar reading exercises are made so as to solidify what has been learned during the sessions; students are also prepared for the following session.

The thread which runs through our course is a de-rusting process: from reading word by word towards a flexible handling of reading styles, from a simple reading purpose towards complex (individual) self-chosen reading situations.

This course precedes a writing because we expect that tackling texts in many different ways, and establishing an awareness of there being different reading purposes for different readers, will have a favourable influence on the writing performance of our students.

The subject matter of most texts is language, literature, communication etc. The texts are informative or persuasive; although there are some literary texts among them, our course is not a literary interpretation course. But as in literature the world of the reader becomes more powerful we cannot lag behind. An

interesting example we used in our course is from Italo Calvino (1982). In his novel Se una notte d'inverne un viaggiatore (If on a winter night a traveller) the reader himself is called on to speak and gradually turns out to be the main character in the novel.

Receptive reading number 1 in our course only asks for facts (false or true), but number 2 for deeper meaning for ideas. We have opted for two different types of exercises because Marton and Sâljö have convinced us ('On qualitive differences in learning' (1976)) that learners (i.e. learning by reading) can roughly be divided into two main categories: surface level processors and deep level processors. This we can also see in the results of the first skimming test: The text dealt with language proficiency schools in The Netherlands (four different ways of teaching and studying language proficiency). The macro-structure also consisted of four parts, above each of which the students had to put a heading . First possibility: name of the city where the university was located; second possibility: the name of the most important scholar and the third possibility, I think the only interesting one for the deep-level learner: a characterisation of the type of research.
In the last session the students are given two comparable exercises to ascertain whether their reading proficiency (speed and comprehension) have increased as compared to the beginning of the course.

For the structure of paragraphs, relationships, argumentation etc. we based ourselves on the work by A. Braet (1979) that can be characterised by New Rethorical approach.

As we were working with our students the main purpose of our course gradually changed from the concept of efficient and flexible reading to what Marton calls a second order perspective; we became more and more interested not in our own explanation but in understanding the ideas the students floated themselves about reading and learning. So the students started learning from each

other's personal thoughts and feelings while reading.
As a starting point for these discussions we used Italo Calvino's text in which seven readers tell each other how they were reading at that very moment and what happened when they were reading.

The test

So we tried to combine the purposes of our course in the design of the last test, chiefly to find out if the students could handle the concept of reading strategy (a combining of reading styles used for a special purpose) and if they could apply it to their own reading.
The test was structured as follows:
The double issue 2/3 of the magazine De Gids (114th year of publication, 1981) is devoted to one theme, namely the difference between American and Dutch novels. It bore the title: "Is the Dutch novel in need of more street-noise? Anbeek has a contribution in this issue called:
Attack and social distance: a comparison between Dutch and American Novels.
It is a short article, the chief argument of which runs as follows: American literature concentrates on the things man is confronted with in society: violence, injustice, power. The Dutch novel tends to focus on the author's inner life.

The editors of De Gids asked several writers and critics to react to this article. From this collection of articles (19) we selected the 7 articles and we formulated this assignment.
Give a report of the way in which you have read the articles, making sure that your reading report
- brings out clearly what your reading purpose was
- states your reading strategy
- provides evidence of an effective use of the theoretical indications

The formulation of the assignment gave the individual student ample scope for working on it in his own personal way.

Appendix

	INFORMATION	EXERCISE IN READING STYLE	TEKXT*	HOMEWORK
0.	Introduction purpose and outline course	receptive reading		students diary reading styles (Pugh)
1.	Reading styles Reading purposes	receptive R.1 receptive R.2 search R.1		diary receptive R.3 receptive R.4
2.	Structures in books in articles	scanning 1 skimming 1 search R.2		diary paragraph structure (Braet)
3.	Structures in paragraphs Topic sentences Advances organisers	skimming 2 skimming 3 search R.3		diary skimming related articles I. Calvino
4	Responsive Reading Context	responsive R.1 responsive R.2		diary argumentation related articles
5.	Argumentation	reading strategy reading pruposes		diary reading purpose related articles
6.	Introduction Test (Purpose + strategy)	receptive R.5 receptive R.6		test

* It would go too far to give the texts we used for exercises.

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